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AUTHOR	Morreale, Sherwyn P., Ed.; Cooper, Pamela; Perry, Carolyn
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines suggested guidelines for oral communication curricula that are an important step in establishing educational standards for teaching students how to communicate orally in the diverse situations they encounter. It notes the guidelines should be adapted to the unique capabilities and needs of students. The paper contains three main sections entitled: (1) Enhancing the Role of Oral Communication in Elementary and Secondary Education; (2) Oral Communication Curriculum: Objective, Overview, and Criteria; and (3) Oral Communication Competencies and Content Areas for Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade. An appendix lists standards for speaking, listening and media literacy in K-12 education. Contains 28 references and 2 tables. (EF)

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Guidelines for Developing

Oral Communication Curricula

in

Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade

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The first edition of the *Guidelines for Developing Oral Communication Curricula in Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade* was revised in November 1990. An NCA K-12 Curriculum Guidelines Committee was proposed by James Chesebro, Director of Education Services, and Cassandra Book, Education Policy Board Chair and was created by the NCA Legislative Council to solicit and propose revisions to the first edition. At the 1991 NCA annual meeting, Arlie Daniel, Carmendale Fernandez, and Mary Mino were selected to serve two-year terms as members of the committee. Specifically, the committee's charge was to suggest changes so that the K-12 document would become more coherent, integrated, readable, better adapted to K-12 instructors, and more clearly tied to other related NCA documents. The 1992 Chicago conference included a panel, "How Should NCA's K-12 Curriculum Guidelines Be Changed?" This panel was organized and submitted by James Chesebro and sponsored by the Educational Policies Board. Arlie Daniel chaired the panel and Carmendale Fernandez and Mary Mino served as panel participants. The panel's primary purpose was to schedule an "open hearing" to provide an opportunity for any NCA member to suggest revisions to the NCA 1990 K-12 Guidelines document. At this panel there were a variety of recommendations made by NCA members, including Melissa Beall, Pamela Cooper, and Mary Bozik. Based on these recommendations, the document underwent its first revision. The second and present edition was produced in 2000, not changing the substance of the guidelines but adding historical events that have occurred since 1990 and more recent references and resources from communication literature. Sherry Morreale, NCA Associate Director, and Pamela Cooper and Carolyn Perry developed the second edition. The following NCA members served as reviewers:

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Guidelines for Developing Oral Communication Curricula in Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade

Second Edition July 2000

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National Communication Association
1765 N Street, N.W.
Washington, DC, 20046
202-464-4NCA
www.natcom.org
Sherwyn P. Morreale
NCA Associate Director
Second Edition Editor

Foreword

Like other associations concerned with educational issues, the National Communication Association has been extremely concerned about the quality of the education children are receiving in our public schools. Two questions have been particularly critical from our perspective.

- Can our students communicate effectively in face-to-face and mediated situations?
- Are we teaching our students what they need to know to communicate effectively?

Unfortunately, our research indicates that in many instances the answer to both questions is no. A significant percentage of our students cannot adequately communicate orally. One-quarter of our students cannot give clear, simple directions to others. In terms of more complicated tasks, even more students lack the skills necessary to communicate their feelings orally to others or to convey basic information to others. Thus, we think it was particularly appropriate, when establishing educational goals for the 1990s, that the National Governors' Association concluded that "all of our people will need to be able to communicate complex ideas." Since that time, other reports and surveys at the national and state levels have called attention to the need for effective K-12 oral communication skill development:

1. *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000* (1991). This report prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor identified five competencies and a foundation of skills and qualities needed for solid job performance. Interpersonal communication skills, speaking, and listening are included.
2. *Goals 2000: National Education Goals Panel Executive Summary* (1992; 1996). This national report referenced the need for college graduates to demonstrate an advanced ability to communicate effectively. That charge is being incorporated in state level standards for K-12.
3. *Teaching the New Basics Skills: Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy* (September, 1996) Free Press. This national survey clearly identified the ability for children to communicate effectively as an essential skill.
4. *A Survey of the Status of Oral Communication in the K-12 Public Educational System* (1999) Communication Education, 48, (2), 139-148. This article summarized the results of a survey sent to state directors of education inquiring about their statewide communication curriculum. The article concludes with a recommendation that communication educators assist with teaching oral communication and ensure that the communication discipline is well represented in K-12 curriculum.

While all of these reports are saying communication is important, conversely, the inability to communicate orally will have profoundly disturbing long-term consequences for our students. Now, more than ever, employers are looking for people who are articulate and persuasive. Moreover, we live in an age in which all individuals must be able to express their feelings to others in face-to-face as well as mediated settings. Each of us must be able to communicate orally with our families, our friends and peers, our colleagues and employers, and our government. Given the growing importance that the mass media play in our lives, it is also important that we understand and are able to critically evaluate its content and function. Finally,

while the emerging multicultural society is creating new opportunities and options for all of us, it also requires that we be far more sensitive to what we say and how we say it.

Years of experience and research have demonstrated that students can be trained to be more effective oral communicators. While it is true that communication studies is one of the fastest growing majors on college and university campuses, it is also true that elementary and secondary schools often fail to train students to become effective speakers. For many of the nation's youth, elementary and secondary schools represent their only opportunity for formal communication training.

Equally important, mastering oral communication requires understanding the process. Great speakers, listeners, and participants in mediated communication are more than technicians; they must understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. In this regard, schools are failing to provide substantive instruction that would allow students to understand the ever-changing oral communication process that continues to evolve and present new challenges as they mature and develop.

In all, training in oral communication remains one of the most neglected of the basic skills. Students need both to understand and to master the oral communication process if they are to function effectively with others.

The guidelines for oral communication curricula outlined in this document represent an important step in providing a set of educational standards for teaching students how to communicate orally in the diverse situations they encounter and will continue to encounter. These guidelines must be adapted to the unique capabilities and needs of students. Yet, they remain an essential first step.

In addition to these guidelines, the National Communication Association has produced other resource materials for K-12 oral communication instruction. In 1998 NCA developed and published a foundation document, *Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards and Competency Statements* (See Appendix for a listing of the standards. The complete document is available from the National Communication Association at www.natcom.org.) A forthcoming NCA publication of curricular teaching activities will increase the usefulness of the standards and competency document. These two documents, along with this curriculum guideline document, will aid schools in oral communication curriculum development. These documents are intended to provide direction for, rather than dictate, what should be taught in the K-12 classroom.

Professional educators, parents, and concerned citizens must commit to establishing standards for a comprehensive and developmental educational program, which provides students with the opportunity to improve their communication skills as they move from kindergarten through twelfth grade. These guidelines, along with NCA's standards and competency statements and teaching activities, provide a foundation for such programs.

Enhancing the role of oral communication in elementary and secondary education

Oral communication education as a national objective

Rationale for communication curriculum guidelines for kindergarten through twelfth grade oral begins with recognition that oral communication education is critical to the overall education of every student. It is the basic skill all students must master for academic success.

The nation's political and educational leaders have stated that oral communication education should be a national objective. For example, in its 1978 amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Congress held that "educational agencies" should "improve instruction" so that "all children are able to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication, both written and oral."

Likewise, in its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*,[1] the National Commission on Excellence in Education held that high school graduates should be able to "listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently." Additionally, in its 1983 report *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*,[2] the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching argued that, "The high school curriculum should also include a study of the spoken word," and it recommended that "high schools give priority to oral communication."[3]

The National Governors' Association has adopted "national education goals" which included a commitment not only to having students "communicate effectively," but to "demonstrate an advanced ability" to "communicate effectively." The nation's governors additionally specified that, "Achievement tests must not simply measure minimum competencies, but also higher levels of reading, writing, speaking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills."[4]

In 1992 and 1996, Goals 2000 mandated inclusion of communication in K-12 education. Similarly, the US Department of Labor identified competencies necessary for solid job performance. Among the competencies listed were interpersonal communication skills, listening, and speaking.[5]

The importance of systematic oral communication instruction

The importance of oral communication cannot be over-emphasized. That is not to suggest that reading and writing are any less important in a student's education than oral communication. However, too often educators have erroneously concluded that after children learn to talk, they will continue to develop their oral communication competence with no formal instruction. Such is not the case, any more than it is of reading and writing. As the *Report of the NCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies* concluded:

> As has been noted here and elsewhere, speech communication instruction in the past has been largely absent from elementary school curricula, occurs in bits and pieces in junior high school curricula, and emerges as a single elective or required course in senior high schools. Even in school systems

with more elaborate speech communication programs, the segments of the program are, more often than not, poorly articulated. The perspective taken in this chapter underscores the importance of program continuity. Children function as message strategists, for better or worse, long before they enter high school.[6]

The most significant mode of communication

Oral communication is also important because it is how we spend the largest percentage of our day and the predominant method by which we interact with others. In their text, Oral Communication in Elementary Schools, M.L. Wilbrand and E. Rieke provide the following analogy:

> Look at it another way. If all the communication activity of the typical person for a typical day—all the reading, writing, speaking, and listening—were expressed in terms of getting dressed in the morning, then reading and writing would constitute no greater proportion than that involved in zipping up a jacket. Most of us spend most of our communication day listening or talking. In fact, many people go for days at a time without zipping up their jackets all the way, but they do not go out undressed.[7]

More specifically, early researchers found that people spend 75 percent of their day engaged in communication.[8] Of that 75 percent, later researchers found that students spend 53 percent of their communication time listening, compared to 17 percent reading, 16 percent speaking, and 14 percent of their time writing.[9]

In addition to spending a great deal of time in oral communication, our communication skills are central to our lives and our work. In a recent survey of over 100 articles, commentaries, and publications which call attention to the importance of the study of communication in contemporary society, four themes in the bibliography provide support for the centrality of communication education to: the development of the whole person, the improvement of the educational enterprise, being a responsible citizen of the world, both socially and culturally, and succeeding in one's career in the business world.[10]

Lack of oral communication skills among nation's youth

Interestingly, at present, the absence of formal communication training is adversely and profoundly affecting students' abilities to function as effective communicators. Anita L. Vangelisti and John A. Daly concluded that 25 percent of the nation's young people cannot adequately communicate orally. More specifically, they focused only upon conveying basic information, not the more complex issues involved in communicative interactions. Just in terms of conveying information, they observed that 62.9 percent of young people cannot explain how to get to a local grocery store so that another can understand the directions.[11]

Standards for designing a local oral communication curriculum

In establishing a national objective, leaders have emphasized that a curriculum should be comprehensive and responsive to a wide range of different needs. While this document does not

attempt to develop a specific standardized national curriculum, given that local curricula should be designed for the needs of local students, it does offer guidelines to assist those educators who are developing comprehensive and developmental oral communication instruction in elementary and secondary schools. In addition, this document is designed to help local organizations create oral communication standards that:

- are grounded in the communication discipline;
- are focused on academic performance but also extended to and relevant to communication in the home, at work, and in social interactions;
- are combinations of pertinent knowledge, appropriate skills, and attitudes without pursuing one at the expense of the other;
- are teachable, observable, and assessable;
- are manageable given time constraints inherent in public education, while equitably representing each aspect of communication--fundamentals, speaking, listening, and media literacy;
- are rigorous and challenging to all students' capabilities; and
- are reflections of the belief that the acquisition of knowledge, mastery of skills, and cultivation of attitudes are developmental processes in which students show growth in learning from grades K-12.

Communication careers in contemporary society

A vast number of professional careers require training in communication. For example, corporate managers "spend more of their time communicating (about 75%-80%) and most of that time in oral communication (about 60% face-to-face within dyadic discussions or in meetings, or via the telephone)."[12] Students require specific training to prepare them to understand and to master the oral communication competencies expected of them following high school and college. However, to acquire such competencies, understanding and mastering the oral communication process must begin in elementary and secondary grades and be consistently reinforced. Effective communication, like any other educational objective, is a life-long process, requiring early exposure and training, consistent and effective reinforcement, with increasing options for self-development and exploration.

Communicating orally in global and multicultural environments

In addition, the global and multicultural society requires greater sensitivity to communication, particularly to oral communication. *In Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*,[13] Walter J. Ong reported that the vast majority of world cultures continue to use orality as the principal method for conveying understandings from one generation to the next. As Ong has explicitly argued, orality is not merely a neutral channel for conveying information. An oral medium draws attention to certain information and not to other information; an oral medium configures information in one way rather than others. Ultimately, orality determines how one understands in ways far different than literate or electronic communication media do.[14]

The critical issue is that an understanding of the social and cognitive functions of orality among the world's cultures must be a basic factor in any core humanities curriculum. The fact

that orality, rather than literacy or electronics, is predominantly employed as the medium for conveying cultural understandings from one generation to another dramatically affects what people know and the values they acquire.

Critical role of elementary and secondary schools

Elementary and secondary schools are the primary environments where the majority of students are likely to be exposed to the study and mastery of oral communication. Since elementary and secondary schools are essentially the only educational environments in which many students will be exposed to the study of communication, the communication curricula offered from kindergarten through twelfth grade should be as complete, comprehensive, and as systematic as possible.

Many graduates of the U.S. educational system do not continue on to college but go directly into the work force. In a 1999 survey of 1,015 adult workers in the U.S., 87% rated communication skills as being "very important" for performing their jobs. That compares with 50 percent who rated computer skills as being "very important." [15] Furthermore, the graduates who do continue on to higher education may be exposed to some communication education in a basic college course, but they may not receive sufficient exposure to communication knowledge and skills. Were a foundation for communication education laid in elementary and secondary schools, then college students would benefit more from the activities and educational experiences that hopefully are provided in most post-secondary curricula.

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Endnotes

1 Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

2 NY: Harper & Row.

3 Ibid., p. 92.

4 National Governors' Association, Educating America: State Strategies for Achieving the National Education Goals (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association, 1990), pp. 37 and 39.

5 "What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000." U.S. Department of Labor, (1991).

6 "Report of the NCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies." National Communication Association, (1988).

7 "The Importance of Listening Ability," English Journal (College Edition), 17, 623-630.

8 "Measurement of Time Spent Communicating," Journal of Communication, 20 (June 1972), 142-158.

9. (1980). "An Investigation of Proportional Time Spent in Various Communication Activities by College Students." Journal of Applied Communication Research, 8,(1980) 101-109.

10 "Why Communication is Important: A Rationale for the Centrality of the Study of Communication" Journal of the Association for Communication Administration, 28, (1), (2000) 1-25.

11 Center for Policy Research, National Governors' Association, State Actions to Restructure Schools: First Step (Washington, DC: National Governors' Association, 1990), p. v.

12 National Communication Association, Pathways to Careers in Communication (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1990).

13 NY: Methuen, 1982.

14 Ong, pp. 57-62.

15 (1999) "Making the Grade? What American Workers Think Should Be Done to Improve Education." The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University and the Center for Survey Research Analysis at the University of Connecticut.

Oral communication curriculum:

Objective, overview, and criteria

Locally designed curricula to meet student needs

These guidelines are designed to assist administrators and instructors develop elementary and secondary oral communication curricula. The guidelines provide suggestions for the development of programs that are tailored to the needs of students and local educational goals and resources. They are not intended to function as the foundation for a standardized national curriculum.

The actual development of specific communication programs should be the responsibility of local educators who are better able to assess, respond, and design functional communication programs which deal directly with the particular communication problems of students within their communities. Therefore, the guidelines outlined in this document are intended only to extend the range of options and possibilities available to local educators as they develop oral communication programs.

Criteria for the development of curriculum guidelines

The guidelines recommended here were formulated with the following criteria as standards:

- Proficiency in oral communication is central to all learning, critically useful to the individual in all areas of life, and is a developmental process in which skills acquired early serve as a foundation for subsequent learning activities.
- As a developmental process, oral communication education should be as carefully supervised from the earliest stages to the completion of an individual's formal education as are the other communication skills such as reading and writing.
- Oral communication is a complex process, and instruction about it should be approached from several different perspectives in each grade.

These guidelines recommend that oral communication instruction in kindergarten through twelfth grade be approached as a holistic process requiring a multiplicity of instructional activities and learning experiences in speaking, listening, creative dramatics, nonverbal communication, and mass media. While that general instruction should be ongoing, in seventh through twelfth grade, instruction should begin to reflect the major substantive areas of study in the discipline of communication such as interpersonal, small group, public speaking, persuasion, debate, and so forth.

While oral communication needs to be a clearly defined part of the elementary school curriculum, it is not recommended that speaking, listening, and media literacy instruction be isolated from instruction in other areas of the curriculum. One of the most effective ways of developing oral communication skills in elementary school classrooms is to stress speaking, listening, and media literacy across the curriculum. Solving problems in social studies through

small group discussions, reporting orally on the results of science experiments, dramatizing stories from children's literature, privately expressing one's thoughts and feelings during a writing conference, reading literature aloud, critically evaluating the source of a video presentation, and talking through mathematical problems with others, all are examples of how children use oral communication in the classroom throughout the day. Such activities offer a rich context for gaining facility in oral communication if the classroom teacher is academically prepared, through pre-service or in-service opportunities, to teach the speaking, listening, and media literacy knowledge and skills needed for success in those activities.

The relation of oral communication to other curricular elements

Oral communication instruction need not be another burden placed on teachers' already overburdened shoulders. Instead, oral communication instruction becomes an asset in enhancing all manner of teaching and learning. As Wilbrand and Rieke suggest:

> Remember that we said that learning of other subjects is enhanced as children improve in communication. Direct instruction of oral communication is necessary just as direct instruction of other subjects is necessary. There is a genuine reciprocity in teaching oral communication: children learn to communicate and their communication facilitates their learning of all subjects. Spending the day in class working problems, reading assignments and completing pages in workbooks, writing answers to questions posed by the teacher, and taking quizzes and exams produces learning, but there is so much more that could be learned. Understanding of mathematics can be more meaningful and useful if students explain problems to each other aloud, if they use the math to work out group decisions, if they produce evidence in their speeches and decision making that is based on arithmetical calculations. Appreciation of social studies is enhanced if children can re-live experiences from the past by performing historical literatures, or if they can experience for themselves through discussion and debate some of the critical decisions of the past: should we leave our homes and venture into the unknown to find new opportunity; should we separate from the mother country through revolution; should we try to live with the Indians or drive them away; how can we grow enough food to last the winter; is slavery ever justified. Children must learn to function in society and they cannot be fully taught through books and written exercises. Children can do so much more by interviewing people who are now involved in society, by presenting prepared speeches on social problems, by debating current issues, by participating in work groups to accomplish social tasks, by learning to interact with people of various backgrounds and cultures. Of course, our literary heritage must be heard and experienced to be fully understood. This means discussions of and the oral performance of literatures. These are examples. Classes in art, music, physical education, reading, writing, as well as science are all enhanced by oral communication.[1]

Thus, for example, five perspectives—speaking, listening, creative drama, nonverbal communication, and mass media--are explicitly incorporated and reflected in the kindergarten

through sixth grade curriculum guidelines. Seventh through twelfth grade curriculum guidelines reflect the diverse perspectives of the major substantive areas of the discipline.

The quest for the fully integrated curriculum is not without its problems. It remains extremely difficult, for example, to identify and to define the theoretical and functional relationships between any two specific learning activities that require different cognitive orientations and skills. As Barry M. Kroll and Roberta J. Vann demonstrate in *Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts*[2] and as Christopher Thaiss and Charles Suhor underscored again in *Speaking and Writing K-12*,[3] it is frequently difficult to achieve a fully integrated language arts curriculum, given the prior training teachers have received, available learning environments, and so forth. As R.R. Allen and Robert W. Kellner have put it:

> Ironically, while many elementary language arts textbooks advocate integration, they contain separate chapters on reading, writing, speaking, and listening. And in the schools, the integration of the language arts peaks in kindergarten and declines as grade level increases. By the time the child reaches secondary school, language arts instruction is neatly fragmented into separate courses. On the college level, the fragments are divided even further.[4]

Hence, the integrated language arts curriculum remains only an ideal. The actual development of interdisciplinary goals and standards, the merger of theoretical and functional objectives across disciplines, the adequate training of teachers to participate in such programs, and the creation of appropriate learning contexts, all may delay the creation of integrated language arts curricula. In the interim, progress should continue on the explicit development of oral communication curricula, with integration achieved if and when circumstances permit.

Although the curriculum guidelines place particular emphasis on a given area of competency for each grade level, the curriculum guidelines, while sequential, are not completely separate from level to level. The content areas specified are not exclusively the domain of the grade level indicated, and may be taught earlier, and subsequently reinforced and refined throughout the student's school years. For example, a teacher would most assuredly work on increasing student listening competency at all grade levels.

Five communication perspectives

The guidelines provide for a competency and content based curriculum that allows for any number of pedagogical approaches and strategies. Thus, the K-6 curriculum guidelines recommended here are approached from five different perspectives (e.g., speaking, listening, creative dramatics, nonverbal, and mass media), while the 7-12 curriculum guidelines reflect the diverse perspectives of the major substantive areas of the discipline. One might want to implement the competency and convey the content with various applied techniques (i.e., public speaking, debate, small group communication, interpersonal communication, etc.). A variety of methods and activities would be used to develop the competency. For example, students might use storytelling or dramatization as well as a discussion or debate to develop competencies in role and norm development. It is the competencies involved, such as recognizing and participating appropriately in social conventions that is the focus, not the activity used to develop it (such as role play).

At the same time, it should be noted that the kindergarten through sixth grade curriculum guidelines are grounded in rather convincing research regarding the developmental capabilities of students in these grades. Accordingly, given the relatively precise concrete operational phases that rather rigorously define students' educational capacities through sixth grade, it is not expected that tremendous curriculum variations can be achieved during these earlier grades. However, given the more formal study of communication which can generally be introduced at the seventh grade level and beyond, far greater variation is possible and should be expected in terms of what courses are offered and when they are offered.

Overview

Thirteen guidelines are offered for the development of a comprehensive, developmental elementary and secondary oral communication curriculum. Specifically, a guideline is proposed for each grade from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The guidelines are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

A developmental conception of a communication curriculum

Grade	Guideline
Kindergarten	Learning activities should focus upon the acquisition of basic oral language skills.
First Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to increase their oral language options and choices.
Second Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to identify the range of relationships among roles, norms, and oral language choices.
Third Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to understand the range of options and possibilities which oral language creates in small group and multicultural settings.
Fourth Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to be exposed to how oral language reflects and conveys values, particularly in terms of the choices, alternatives, and consequences of the values embedded in oral communication.
Fifth Grade	Learning activities should provide students with opportunities to understand the social conventions regulating oral communication.
Sixth Grade	Learning activities should provide students with a formal exposure to the requirements and effective use of listening.

Seventh Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to identify, understand, and experience the requirements for effective interpersonal, nonverbal, and small group communication.
Eighth Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to understand the effects of cultural systems upon effective oral communication.
Ninth Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to develop competencies in public speaking.
Tenth Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to become more aware of themselves and their values in relation to media values, to evaluate critically media messages and sources, and to become comfortable expressing themselves via various media.
Eleventh Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to understand and experience the dimensions and implications of argumentation, persuasion, and debate.
Twelfth Grade	Learning activities should provide opportunities for students to be formally introduced to the study of oral language, especially the relationship between language and environments they will encounter when they leave high school.

Endnotes

1 M.L. Wilbrand and E. Rieke, *Oral Communication in Elementary Schools* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1983), p. 15.

2 Eds., (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1981).

3 Eds., (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1984).

4 "Integrating the Language Arts," in Thaiss & Suhor, p. 209.

Oral communication competencies and content areas for kindergarten through twelfth grade

Use of and rationale for oral communication competencies

The recommended communication competencies and content areas outlined in these curriculum guidelines have been grouped into primary learning clusters which reflect a student's developmental progression as she or he moves from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Adopting the distinction proposed by Barbel Inhelder and Jean Piaget,[1] the most fundamental distinctions divide the concrete operational phase characterizing learning in kindergarten through sixth grade from the formal operational phase characterizing learning in seventh through twelfth grades. Additionally, in terms of these curriculum guidelines, it has been useful to recognize that different learning issues dominate the concrete operational stage. Hence, competency and content areas involved in the acquisition of fundamental language skills in kindergarten through second grade have been distinguished in this curriculum from the more explicitly social implications of communication which develop in third through sixth grades. Essentially, then, three clusters of learning activities are employed in this curriculum (see Table 2).

Table 2

A developmental conception of a communication curriculum

Phases	Grades	Curriculum
Concrete Operational	K-2nd Grade	Fundamental Oral Language Skills
	3rd-6th Grade	Oral Communication in Social Settings
Formal Operational	7th-12th Grade	The Study of Oral Communication

As is true of any formal system, these phases must frequently be adjusted to specific groups of students, particularly in educational settings. The phases represent qualitatively different responses to logical problems which vary from culture to culture and which admit of tremendous variation within any single cultural grouping. As Don M. Boileau has noted, "These stages are most easily identified by age groupings, yet any given child's age for entering a stage may vary from the statistically derived norms. Also, the specific age for a given stage varies in terms of the culture under investigation."[2] Recognizing the limitations of using these phases, the following learning clusters provide some basic guidelines, which necessarily must be adapted and adjusted by particular instructors to fit specific groups of students.

Additionally, within each cluster, a wide range of oral communication competencies can be developed. In this curriculum, specific suggestions are provided in each cluster. As the citations employed reveal, these suggestions are explicitly linked to specific research findings and to practical teaching experiences. However, particular teachers will need to determine which competencies are most needed for their particular students. Accordingly, student needs, understandings, and skills must be determined before any particular curriculum is planned.

Teachers should necessarily plan to employ a wide range of assessment mechanisms and measures (e.g., apprehension, self-conception, performance, and cognition) before adopting any particular curriculum for any specific group of students. Thus, the proposed curriculum must necessarily be viewed only as a set of potential guidelines that can be useful when designing a specific curriculum.

Kindergarten through second grade — Fundamental oral language skills

From kindergarten through second grade, instruction should occur in three basic areas: acquiring basic oral linguistic skills, increasing oral language options, and increasing role options through oral language.

- **Kindergarten — Acquiring basic oral linguistic skills**

During kindergarten, learning activities should focus upon the acquisition of basic oral linguistic skills. This cluster of learning activities focuses upon the development of linguistic systems, including phonology, syntax, and semantics. In greater detail, the NCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies Report has particularly recommended that instructors focus on semantics when they concentrate on the development of students' linguistic systems:

> Most of these studies, both of individual and word meaning and of sentence meaning, support a picture of a gradual and steady differentiation toward adult meaning systems throughout the elementary years. Semantic development seems less dramatic than syntactic development; it is also more influenced by society and more highly related to almost every other aspect of development than is syntactic development. . . . It may be that the gradualism indicated in many studies is accounted for more by individual differences in pace of development than by patterns of the child's acquisition. Semantic development, somewhat like syntax and not at all like phonology, seems never to end. Meanings of words and sentences change with age, social change, and other factors throughout the life span. Of the three areas of grammar reviewed here, semantics is the one in which the public school is likely to make its most positive contribution to children.[3]

Accordingly, the goal of such learning activities is not oral repetition, drills, the acquisition of detailed phonological or syntactical knowledge, or even to standardize students' phonological or syntactical behaviors. Rather, the instructional objective is to increase the range of phonological and syntactical options, with the semantic options available to students in actual conversations receiving the greatest attention. In an oral communication curriculum, the relevant instructional mode at this level should necessarily be face-to-face oral conversations.

Based upon the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, kindergarten children might demonstrate the ability to speak clearly and distinctly, to imitate correct speech patterns, identify source of sounds, interpret nonverbal messages through pictures, listen to instructions, orally share information and experiences, and pantomime nursery rhymes and stories.

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- **First grade — increasing oral language options**

During first grade, instructors should provide opportunities for students to increase their oral language options and choices. Invoking the distinction between "elaborated" and "restricted" codes, the NCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies Report concluded that instructional activities should concentrate on language choices and the nature of the linguistic system which generates such choices rather than the motivations for any particular language decision:

> Such a view of Bernstein's distinction [between elaborated and restricted codes] leads some scholars to advocate the juncture of codes with situations as the key "place" to focus communication instruction, both for those with alleged language problems, and for the K-12 population as a whole. It is not the purpose of this review to render a detailed accounting of attempts to characterize the social-situational codes in communication development, but when various forms of linguistic elements and structures can be used in so many ways (e.g., saying "please" in a command, asking about the weather as a form of polite address, stating a question in affirmative form, idiomatic expression) it is wise to consider such matters in any theory of language. The interest is less in why a speaker chooses a particular form for a particular utterance than in understanding the kind of system that makes such choices possible, meaningful, and likely.[4]

Based upon the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, first graders might be asked to name rhyming words, identify a complete thought, orally order ideas in sequence, tell a familiar story, and identify meaning conveyed by facial expressions.

- **Second grade — increasing role options through oral language**

During second grade, instructors should provide opportunities for students to identify the range of relationships between roles, norms, and oral language choices. The NCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies Report has noted:

> When children start school we expect them to be able to carry on conversations, ask and answer questions, follow and give instructions, and speak alone in the presence of a group. These basic communication roles are a necessary minimum in the traditional elementary school classroom. As children progress through school, we expect these abilities to be refined and differentiated. Furthermore, we expect the child's language code to come to approximate that of the "educated" society; skills in analyzing the demands of communication situations should result in appropriate employment of that code.[5]

Based upon the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, second graders might be asked to identify the main idea of a story, make simple introductions and greetings, role play events in a story, read a story orally, identify classroom and environmental sounds, and orally summarize the meanings conveyed by nonverbal symbols.

Third grade through sixth grade — Oral communication in social settings

Midway through the elementary school experience, students need to begin considering how oral communication functions socially. While the labels may vary, concepts such as feedback, nonverbal communication, and audience analysis must be systematically introduced to students, with opportunities provided for them to understand oral communication as sets of socially constructed experiences.

From third through sixth grade, instruction should occur in four basic areas: making oral language choices in small group and cultural settings, using oral symbols, following speech norms and rules, and listening.

- **Third grade — making oral language choices in small group and cultural settings**

By third grade, instructors should be providing opportunities for students to understand the range of options and possibilities which oral language creates in small group and cultural settings. Competencies to be developed would include the ability to identify orally the types of small groups and cultural settings which can exist, orally identify standards for good speaking in different kinds of small groups and cultural settings, and demonstrate diverse role playing techniques as small group and cultural settings change.

Based upon the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, third grade students could be asked to demonstrate the use of inflectional tone to convey an emotion, use of the telephone for business and social calls, use pantomime as a means of nonverbal communication, dramatize a story, construct a summary for a story, describe differences in sound (e.g., pitch, volume, and rate), and identify how alternative nonverbal actions increase the clarity or more effectively reinforce a verbal message.

- **Fourth grade — using oral symbols**

By fourth grade, instructors should be providing opportunities for students to understand oral symbols. As students enter their middle years in elementary school, they should be introduced to the symbolic function of oral communication, for the symbolic function is ultimately the predominant emphasis of human language-using. Accordingly, students must be systematically introduced to the relationship between oral language and values. Students need to be explicitly exposed to how oral language reflects and conveys values, particularly in terms of the choices, alternatives, and consequences of value-using embedded in oral communication. Students should be able to: identify how different language choices (i.e., different nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.); alter the meanings conveyed to others; demonstrate their ability to select alternative language choices to convey different values; describe another's point of view and recognize how it differs from their own; use spoken language to express their own and respond to others' feelings; provide effective and appropriate feedback; identify rules which regulate social conventions in small groups; and, demonstrate understanding and mastery of these rules in different social settings such as interviews and small group discussions.

- **Fifth grade — following speech norms and rules**

By fifth grade, instructors should be providing students with opportunities to understand the social conventions regulating oral communication. Students should be able to distinguish, identify the requirements for, and demonstrate the skills required to use competently oral communication in interpersonal, small group, and public settings. Additionally, students should be provided with opportunities to understand the forms or strategies of human communication such as the compromise, consensus tactics, the potentialities and limitations of confrontation, and the meaning and functions of the speech of self-defense and the eulogy.

Based on the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, fifth grade students might be asked to identify standards of a competent listener; apply the rules for conducting interviews; apply the rules for conducting discussions; construct and dramatize a different story ending for a familiar story; distinguish between fact and opinion; identify an effective advertisement; and use eye contact, nonverbal expression and adjustment of rate, pace, and volume in face-to-face communication with a number of different people of different ages.

- **Sixth grade — listening**

Listening is a set of skills that students at all levels need to learn and continue to enhance throughout their school years. During the first two years of education, when students learn mostly by listening, teachers should strive for students to acquire the skills of attending to and understanding the meaning of messages. By second or third grade, students should be able to follow a sequence of instructions, begin assessing the credibility of a message or speaker, note the purpose of listening, and gain the meaning of words through the context.

As students progress through the other elementary grades, their skills in listening should include developing the ability to distinguish the differences between informative and persuasive messages and detecting the nonverbal message included in a verbal message. Throughout their grade school experiences, students should continue to expand their skills in discriminative listening as they learn to identify increasing numbers of environmental sounds. With experience, they should be better able to concentrate on one stimulus rather than many, understand how to prepare to listen, engage in "turn-taking" in conversations, and notice subtle significant differences in tone of voice.

At the 6th grade level, the focus is not to begin listening training, but rather to hone the skills students have already acquired and orient them to the advanced skills necessary for discriminating between words as spoken and words as meant, drawing inferences from information, noting strategies for evaluating messages, and recognizing reasoning and arguments used in messages. Based upon the special needs of particular groups of students, any number of specific competencies can be formulated to help students develop their linguistic systems. For example, sixth grade students might be asked to distinguish between hearing and listening, identify the significance and functions of listening in the communication process, identify different types of listening, identify barriers to listening, identify and apply techniques for competent listening, and demonstrate good discussion techniques in terms of listening.

Seventh grade through twelfth grade — The study of oral communication

Junior and senior high school years necessarily constitute passages into more sophisticated oral communication usages. While performance requirements continue to function as an essential dimension of all learning, cognitive understandings become equally important in the communication educational process. From seventh through twelfth grades, instruction should occur in six basic areas. The first of these six basic areas includes interpersonal, nonverbal, and small group communication.

- **Seventh grade — identify and understand the requirements for competent interpersonal, nonverbal, and small group communication**

By seventh grade, students should be able to identify and understand the requirements for competent interpersonal and small group communication. Seventh grade marks a critical developmental turning point in the lives of most students. Social relationships become objects of immediate attention. Primary social groupings emerge, and interpersonal relationships—both social and intimate—become significant, if not overwhelming, issues for students at this time. The Report of the National Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies specifically observed that during this stage of development, students should be able to "evaluate emotional states from verbal and nonverbal communication," "use a variety of communication roles and styles in the peer culture of his or her own language community," and "read social class differences from the nonverbal and verbal communication of others."[6]

Given maturation and changing social roles in seventh through twelfth grades, students need to understand the requirements for, effective uses of, and possess methods for assessing both interpersonal and small group communication. Additionally, if interpersonal and small group communication are to be fully understood, students should understand the role that nonverbal communication plays in effective communication. Thus, students should understand the relationship between nonverbal, interpersonal, and small group communication as well as the types and components of nonverbal communication.

A wide range of perspectives exist regarding how interpersonal, nonverbal, and small group communication should be approached and what competencies students should develop in relationship to these systems. For example, seventh grade students might be asked to define and explain interpersonal communication, identify and define the major characteristics of an interpersonal relationship, define and identify examples of the use of racism and sexism in popular language, name aspects inside the perceiver that can influence perception, describe several communication patterns common to small groups, explain the steps used in problem solving, and list the basic principles of parliamentary procedure.

- **Eighth grade — understand the influence of culture on communication**

By eighth grade, students should be able to understand the effects of cultural systems upon effective oral communication. Additionally, as cultural differences begin to influence student choices and activities, students should demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity) as a significant variable affecting competent oral

communication. The ability to recognize and competently participate in intercultural communication is no longer a skill which can be postponed until later in life. Students are clearly involved in intercultural communication environments in their junior high school years.

Yet, in a multicultural environment, communication competency may be extremely difficult to master. At this age, students are only beginning to formulate personal and ethical decisions regarding the role of multiculturalism within their own lives. Nonetheless, even by eighth grade, as Barbara Wood and her colleagues concluded in 1977 in the Development of Functional Communication Competencies: Grades 7-12, a student must become a "competent adolescent" who "gains and maintains the attention of others in socially acceptable ways," "expresses both affection and hostility to others," "praises oneself and/or shows pride in one's accomplishments," "takes into account another person's point of view in talking with that person, especially if asked to do so," "reads effectively the feedback of others and one's messages: supplies relevant feedback to others when they communicate," and "takes the role of another person effectively without being pushed to do so."[7] Likewise, Eileen Newmark and Molefi K. Asante, in Intercultural Communication, have concluded that intercultural communication "awareness and sensitivity" must begin early in the "secondary school" stages.[8]

It is unlikely that students' attitudes can be dramatically influenced by a single course, for certainly racial, ethnic, and gender attitudes and values are part of a life-long process. Nonetheless, early formal exposure to and understanding of the intercultural communication process may introduce critical variables in students' affective, cognitive, and behavioral patterns of social interaction which alter how biases and discriminatory attitudes do and do not develop in students. For example, eighth grade students might be asked to identify verbal and nonverbal communication patterns which are shared by distinct cultural systems; identify social institutions and historical experiences which distinguish and are commonly used by cultural systems; develop a sensitivity to and appreciation for the diverse ways in which experiences can be articulated verbally and nonverbally; and, communicate competently in alternative cultural systems (e.g., adjust to different environments) without losing their basic values.

- **Ninth grade — participate in public speaking**

By ninth grade, students should develop competencies in public speaking. Research shows that students who are given instruction in public speaking skills, including opportunities to prepare for and practice language in various forms of oral discourse, demonstrate improvement in their speaking presentation, as well as in vocabulary, organization, and writing skills. Ninth grade students who are taught the basic orders of idea development can better illustrate organizational skills in prepared speeches.[9] Competencies to be developed include the ability to identify the distinguishing characteristics of public speaking; effectively complete the steps of speech preparation (select and limit a topic, select a purpose, gather information, analyze the occasion and audience, organize the speech, etc.); distinguish among speech types; competently deliver the speech; and, evaluate speeches.

- **Tenth grade — understand the context of mass communication**

Students should understand the context of mass communication. Students should receive two kinds of training. First, students should be trained in receivership. They should become more aware of themselves and their values in relation to the media by critically evaluating what they see and hear on the media. Second, since present developments in mass communication make it

increasingly likely that citizens will have regular opportunity to communicate by means of one of the media, students should become comfortable expressing themselves via various media. Appropriate to study are electronic media such as radio, television, film, video, and print media such as books, newspapers and magazines.

At this grade level, the competencies to be developed would minimally include the ability to discuss verbal and nonverbal requirements for media performers; perform a short radio or television newscast or commercial; and demonstrate an understanding of ethics in mass communication, effects of the media on society and culture, the commercial nature of media, mass communication research techniques, and new technologies of mass communication and telecommunications.

- **Eleventh grade — understand the dimensions and implications of persuasion, argumentation, and debate**

By eleventh grade, students should be able to understand the dimensions and implications of persuasion, argumentation, and debate as essential oral communication skills. Building on earlier concepts, students should be exposed to concepts such as rhetorical reasoning, evidence, invention, organization, audience analysis, choices of persuasive strategies, and the like. In addition, students should be taught appropriate documentation skills and should have a thorough understanding of the concept of plagiarism.

- **Twelfth grade — participate in the study of language**

During their senior year, students should be formally introduced to the study of language. Focusing upon the study of language, students should be exposed to and expected to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between language and environments they will encounter when they leave high school. Thus, topics for these courses might be "Language and the Work Environment," "Language and Marriage-Family," and "Language and Citizenship." Ultimately, a "senior seminar" format might function as a particularly useful pedagogical environment in which instructors adapt to the particular needs of their students as they prepare to function as communicators in college, participate in society as citizens, and/or enter occupational environments.

While such an "open-ended" and culminating exposure to the study of communication would necessarily be field-dependent, nonetheless a communication perspective of these fields can be particularly useful to students leaving high school. Because a field-dependent study of language should necessarily consider the potential uses graduating seniors will find useful, particular topics will vary from class to class. However, students might be asked to explain the utility of the concept of ethics in communication and describe the characteristics of ethical and unethical behavior; identify major ways in which language systems differ in intimate, friendship, family, educational and business environments; interview and complete a written report based upon field interviews of people in various careers; and develop a personal theory of communication.

Endnotes

1 *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (NY: Basic Books, 1958).

2 "An Investigation of the Effects of a Persuasive Speech: An Application of Piaget's Developmental Theory," *The Speech Teacher*, 24, 1, January 1975, p. 2.

3 R.R. Allen and Kenneth L. Brown, Eds., *Developing Communication Competence in Children: A Report of the Speech Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies* (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company, 1976), p. 11.

4 P. 12

5 P. 18

6 PP184-185

7 (Urban, IL and Falls Church, VA: ERIC and SCA), p. 2.

8 (Urban, IL and Falls Church, VA: ERIC and SCA, 1976), p. 6.

9 Perry, C. *Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement*, 2nd ed., G. Cawelti, editor. (Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service, 1999).

Recommendations for syllabi

Any number of different resources can be used to implement the basic communication curriculum described in this document. No specific textbooks for this basic communication curriculum are recommended or endorsed by NCA. Indeed, a variety of pedagogical approaches are possible. In this document, the development of guidelines for curriculum development has been emphasized, not the creation of specific course syllabi. A curriculum specifies competency and content areas that constitute a general education in a discipline of study. In contrast, a syllabus provides a specific outline for the study of one area of specialization within a discipline. Obviously, each instructor will develop the most appropriate syllabus for his/her unique students. Additionally, those planning to teach any component of a communication curriculum should examine the teacher certification and preparation guidelines provided by the National Communication Association and American Alliance for Theatre and Education.

Conclusion

Two facts are outstanding about K-12 oral communication instruction. First, the balance of the state departments of education currently do not require any course in oral communication. Second, many high school students still do not attend college; the exposure to communication instruction they receive at the elementary and secondary levels will constitute the only opportunity they have to understand and master communication in a systematic fashion.

Given these two facts, curriculum guidelines are required. The communication curriculum offered at the elementary and secondary levels should be as comprehensive, substantive, and useful as possible. The guidelines proposed here are a step towards that end.

Appendix

STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND MEDIA LITERACY IN K-12 EDUCATION

Fundamentals of Effective Communication

Competent communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of...

1. the relationships among the components of the communication process.
2. the influence of the individual, relationship, and situation on communication.
3. the role of communication in the development and maintenance of personal relationships.
4. the role of communication in creating meaning, influencing thought, and making decisions.

Competent communicators demonstrate the ability to...

5. demonstrate sensitivity to diversity when communicating.
6. enhance relationships and resolve conflict using appropriate and effective communication strategies.
7. evaluate communication styles, strategies, and content based on their aesthetic and functional worth.
8. show sensitivity to the ethical issues associated with communication in a democratic society.

Speaking

Competent speakers demonstrate...

9. knowledge and understanding of the speaking process.
10. the ability to adapt communication strategies appropriately and effectively according to the needs of the situation and setting.
11. the ability to use language that clarifies, persuades, and/or inspires while respecting differences in listeners' backgrounds.
12. the ability to manage or overcome communication anxiety.

Listening

Competent listeners demonstrate...

13. knowledge and understanding of the listening process.
14. the ability to use appropriate and effective listening skills for a given communication situation and setting.
15. the ability to identify and manage barriers to listening.

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Media Literacy

Media literate communicators demonstrate...

16. knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives.

17. knowledge and understanding of the complex relationships among audiences and media content.

18. knowledge and understanding that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts.

19. knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media.

20. the ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences.